

Seni aide questions Chamlong's remarks

THE spokesman of the Seni government which was toppled by a coup following the Oct 6, 1976 bloodbath emerged yesterday to question embattled Chamlong Srimuang's "patriotic role" in the incident.

Chaiwat Traiyasunant questioned Chamlong's recent statement that he joined rightwing rallies preceding the tragedy because he was concerned about the country.

"Chamlong obviously wanted to suppress the students," Chaiwat said. Hundreds of student demonstrators were massacred when rightwing mobs attacked the Thammasat University on Oct 6.

Chamlong, the Palang Dharma Party leader, said Monday he just wanted the government of M.R. Seni Pramoj "to do anything" to ease political tension resulting from the return of military strongman and former premier Thanom Kittikachorn from exile.

Chaiwat recounted that the tension followed the hanging of two student supporters who had protested Thanom's return in Nakhon Pathom.

"The tension was there, not at Thammasat," he said.

Meanwhile, a group of "Young Turk" officers met yesterday at the City Hall. Col Prab Chotigasatien, a former Young Turk and an advisor to Bangkok Governor Chamlong, said the meeting had nothing to do with politics.

Chamlong, known as a former Young Turk officer, has repeatedly claimed that he acted as just another civilian during the black period of Thailand. Before the Oct 6 turbulence, soldiers were upstaged by politically active students.

Prab, however, criticized Col Prachak Sawangchit, well-known politician and former Young Turk who recently said Chamlong was on intelligence-gathering mission in the days preceding the tragedy.

"Everybody knows what kind of a man Prachak is," Prab said.

'No weapons on campus'

MUANCHON Party leader Chalerm Yoobamrung said yesterday that right-wing movements misled the public before the Oct 6, 1976 violence by portraying students as heavily-armed leftists.

Chalerm, who was then a Crime Suppression Division policeman, said "not a single knife" was found in Thammasat University after the massacre of students.

Before the tragedy, anti-student groups alleged students had stockpiled arms at the university, an accusation widely publicized by the media.

Chalerm ended his election campaign yesterday by recounting the Oct 6 incident and claiming that his rivals Samak Sundaravej and Chamlong Srimuang were "100 per cent" involved in it.

Speaking at Sanam Luang before thousands of people, Chalerm said he was at Thammasat University on Oct 5 and 6 and, as a police officer, closely monitored the situation.

Chalerm claimed he rejected an order to attack students protesting the return from exile of strongman and former premier Thanom Kittikachorn.

He said the several-hour gunfight at the university on the morning of Oct 6 was essentially just the police firing at other police by mistake.

"When the policemen received the ceasefire order, everything was silent," he said. Right-wing mobs later stormed the university and killed hundreds of demonstrators.

Chalerm claimed he took part in a thorough search the morning after at the university.

"There was not a single knife in the university. There were no arms caches or arms tunnels (as alleged). There were only sandals. Even so, some people said the sandals showed that the students were communists," said Chalerm.

The Muanchon leader, however, said students themselves were partly responsible for the incident.

Prachak says Chamlong offered to incite mobs

FORMER 'Young Turk' Col Prachak Sawangchit charged yesterday that embattled Governor Chamlong Srimuang was involved in the 1976 coup following the Thammasat University bloodbath.

Prachak, claiming he could no longer "conceal the truth", said Chamlong "volunteered" to incite military-backed civilian mobs to pressure the government of MR Seni Pramroj to resign, before coup plotters mobilized soldiers to seize power in the evening of Oct 6, 1976.

The allegation contradicted a statement by Col Manoon Roopkhachorn, also a former Young Turk and an accused plotter of the 1985 attempted coup.

Manoon, now in exile in West Germany, told *Thai Rath* in a telephone interview on Thursday that Chamlong had not been involved in either the Oct 6 coup or the massacre of students on the fateful day.

Both Manoon and Prachak are known to have played active roles in the 1976 coup.

Prachak said Chamlong brought some soldiers from the 4th Cavalry Battalion to control mobs at Government House and the Royal Plaza. The soldiers disguised themselves as civilians, Prachak said.

The 4th Cavalry Battalion was then under Manoon's command. Manoon told *Thai Rath* that Chamlong, who was then a major, "had no authority to mobilize military forces."

Chamlong said during an interview yesterday that Manoon "is telling the truth."

Prachak had said Chamlong was on an information-gathering mission during the political turbulence.

"I said so because I wanted to defend Chamlong. Now that things have gone this far, I could no longer

conceal the truth," he said.

A group of former Young Turks gathered at City Hall on Thursday and reportedly criticized Prachak for trying to link Chamlong, the city governor and Palang Dharma Party leader, to the Oct 6 violence.

In his harshest criticism against Chamlong, Prachak called the governor a "liar and betrayer".

Manoon described Chamlong as a "virtuous man, and peace lover".

Chamlong said during a poll rally last week that if he had really been involved in the coup, he would have been "awarded a big position" after the incident like other Young Turks.

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Martial law in Burmese city

MARTIAL law was declared in the northern Burmese city of Prome yesterday after six days of rioting, Rangoon Radio reported.

The official radio, making the announcement on the eve of a crucial congress of the ruling socialist party, said the decision was taken because the situation was "out of control".

The emergency congress of the Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP), the exclusive political force in the country, was convened after sporadic clashes throughout the country in the last five months in which more than 200 people died.

Prome, a city of 150,000 people 180 miles (290 km) north-west of the capital, Rangoon, on the Irrawaddy River, is the home town of Ne Win, the BSPP chairman who has ruled Burma with an iron hand since taking over in a coup in 1962.

Reuter

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But Prachak charged that Chamlong unsuccessfully asked senior military officials — former premier Gen Kriangsak Chomanan and Gen Serm Na Nakhon — to promote him.

"He was refused and very upset," Prachak said.

Though giving conflicting accounts, Manoon and Prachak proposed that a committee be set up to get to the bottom of the Oct 6 incident so that history can be rewritten correctly.

Manoon also said the student movement crushed in 1976 had one thing in common with Chamlong: "They were once regarded as new hopes of the people."

"After the Oct 14, 1973, uprising [that toppled the dictatorial government of Field Marshal Thanom Kittikachorn], the student movement became the people's new hope for democracy. But two years later, other movements created turmoil and labelled the students, leftists," Manoon said.

"Those things are happening to Chamlong."

The Oct 6 debate has substantially damaged the popularity of Palang Dharma and Chamlong, who romped to a landslide gubernatorial election victory in 1985 with a moderate, devout Buddhist image.

Chamlong should blame himself for his party's poor showing

By Termsak C. Palanupap

POLITICIANS have a universal tendency to blame others and factors beyond their control and responsibility for their defeat. Palang Dharma Party leader Chamlong Srimuang is no exception.

His party fielded 319 candidates, the largest of all the 18 parties who contested in the July 24 general election in which 357 seats were at stake. It won only 14 seats, 10 of them in Bangkok where its arch-rival, the Prachakorn Thai Party, won 20 seats. The party of Samak Sundaravej ended up capturing 31 seats nationwide.

Perhaps the worst setback of the Palang Dharma was its defeat in Bangkok's Constituency 1 by Samak's team. The defeat could be seen as a direct affront to Chamlong who sent his wife, Mrs Sirilak, to lead a Palang Dharma team in the constituency, which has long been Samak's stronghold.

Chamlong abruptly formed his party in early May a few days after the House dissolution on April 29. His party quickly attracted a lot of public attention with its promise to field only "good people" for the voters to choose as "new alternatives" to the "bad people" who have dominated national politics.

Chamlong claimed his party was like "clean water" which would flush out "polluted water" and he obviously had the Prachakorn Thai in mind when he talked about the "polluted water" contaminating national politics.

Chamlong didn't run in the election because he wanted to keep his promise and hold his job as Bangkok governor until the end of his four-year term late next year. He sent his wife as his proxy in a battle against Samak in Constituency 1.

Mrs Sirilak came fourth, receiving 31,260 votes, in the three-member constituency. Samak came first with 43,277 votes, followed by his teammates Mrs Lalita Lerksamrarn, 38,298 votes and Lt Gen Chitrapol na Lampang (retired).

Chamlong suspects that some military leaders, including those of the Class V of the Chullachomklao Royal Military Academy, headed by Assistant Army Commander-in-Chief Gen Suchinda Kraprayoon, are afraid that a rapid growth of the Palang Dharma Party will



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boost Chamlong's political power and hurt them. Chamlong used to be one of the key leaders of the Class VII and the Young Turks who were at odds with graduates of the Class V.

Military leaders could certainly work behind the scenes to help Samak's team in Constituency 1, which includes several military barracks. Observers noted that most polling stations in the military area did show heavy returns in favour of Samak's team. But Chamlong's claim that 40,000 of Samak's 43,277 votes were from the military servicemen and their families was certainly an exaggeration.

Where were the Silent Majority?

Chamlong repeatedly pleaded with indifferent eligible voters, the so-called "Silent Majority", in Bangkok to go out and vote for his party's candidates. His pleas apparently fell on deaf ears as only about 37.5 per cent of the eligible voters in the capital cast their ballots on the Sunday of July 24, compared with 37.3 per cent in the

general election of July 1986.

Chamlong has himself to blame for the low voter turnout because inspiring Bangkokians to vote is part of his job as Bangkok governor.

A lot of Bangkokians usually don't vote because they don't see or don't understand how their votes are going to make a difference. Chamlong tried but failed to convince these people that voting for the Palang Dharma candidates was a meaningful alternative to not voting.

He wanted the people to believe that all of his party's candidates are "good people" although some of them are actually veteran politicians from other parties, and one of them a former MP of the Prachakorn Thai Party. Chamlong ensured that they would remain "good" by forbidding them from aspiring for Cabinet posts. If elected, all of them will neither join a government coalition or an opposition bloc. Now we will have 14 Palang Dharma "watch dogs" in the House who are under Chamlong's remote control.

Chamlong also has himself to blame for his awkward attempts to hide his involvement in the events leading to the massacre of demonstrators at Thammasat University on October 6, 1976 and the ensuing coup that evening. Chamlong at first tried to claim that he was only a passive bystander. But revelations of people who knew or worked with Chamlong during those tragic days indicated that Chamlong was actively involved in organizing right-wing rallies opposing the demonstrators, who were protesting the return of deposed premier Field Marshal Thanom Kittikachorn.

Chamlong said he couldn't lie because he has for many years stayed under the eight Buddhist commandments. But he obviously was "economical with the truth" when he was discussing his role and the Oct 6 incident.

Thinking people, who are part of the Silent Majority, could easily detect inconsistencies in Chamlong's changing stories about his role. This seriously tarnished Chamlong's image as a trustworthy politician. Perhaps this was the single most important factor that hurt his party in the election.

Therefore, it is wrong for Chamlong to think that the voters didn't care to help the "good people" of his party. Rather, the poor showing of his party meant that neither his party nor Chamlong himself is good enough as claimed.

Chamlong: Oct 6 reports meant to discredit PDP

PALANG Dharma Party leader Chamlong Srimuang suggested yesterday that the media investigative reports of the Oct 6, 1976 incident were orchestrated to discredit his party before the July 24 election.

Chamlong claimed that some people made accusations during the campaign that he was involved in the massacre of protesting students 12 years ago and that the rumour has surprisingly died down since the election.

"Somebody invented such mudslinging tricks before the poll to diminish Palang Dharma candidates' chances of winning House seats," said Chamlong.

Suspicion about Chamlong's involvement in the Oct 6, 1976 bloodbath surfaced after a Palang Dharma candidate, Chongkol Srikanchana, stated during a campaign rally that the party leader played a leading role in terminating the students' protests.

Chamlong responded by saying that he did not take part in the violent suppression of protesting students.

Key questions in the Oct 6 enigma

By Nanya Phuncharoen and 6 OCT 1988
Termsak C. Palanupap

AFTER 12 years, the bloody incident at Thammasat on October 6, 1976 remains a big enigma as well as a deep scar in the Thai national conscience. For on that day, heavily armed policemen, joined by right-wing vigilantes, stormed into the Thammasat campus early in the morning under the pretext of breaking up what they claimed was a communist-led anti-monarchy protest. They shot and killed dozens of unarmed demonstrators and rounded up more than 3,150 more and strip-searched them at gun-point. Some of the demonstrators who fled outside the campus were brutally lynched by the vigilantes, who had apparently been brainwashed by a network of military radio stations into believing that the demonstrators were "communist scums of the earth" and that killing them wouldn't be sinful.

How could a Buddhist nation like Thailand slipped into such brutality and lawlessness?

Many apologists see it as merely a historical aberration.

Right-wing leaders say it was an inevitable outburst against the "communists" after years of explosive confrontation since the downfall of the Thanom-Prapass dictatorship in mid-October 1973.

Yet some also suspect it was the work of some sinister military elements that opposed civilian rule and wanted to return to power by capitalizing on the Thai fear of the communist threat, which was increasing following the communist victories in Indochina in 1975. The Thammasat massacre was followed by a military coup that evening.

The panel discussion at Thammasat today is an excellent opportunity to examine the Oct 6 enigma. In order to shed light on this bloody incident, the panel must at least address the following questions.

The Return of Thanom and Prapass

The first question is: Was there a deliberate attempt to provoke protests of the students in the National Student Centre of Thailand (NSCT) by bringing back the two deposed military strongmen, Field Marshal Thanom Kittikachorn and Field Marshal Prapass Charusathira?

The NSCT led a popular uprising to topple the Thanom-Prapass military regime. It had demanded putting Thanom, Prapass and Thanom's son, Col Narong Kittikachorn (now leader of the Liberal Party and an MP from Ayutthaya) on trial for their alleged "crimes" against the demonstrators in October 1973 and alleged corruption while they were in power during the 1960s and early 1970s.

Thanom and Prapass sneaked into Bangkok with ease and impunity, probably in connivance with their men in the military. Prime Minister M.R. Seni Pramoj confided to reporters that the military was sometimes not under control of his government.

Prapass's return on August 17, 1976 led NSCT to protest the government and demand his arrest. Two demonstrators were killed and about 60 wounded in a clash between the demonstrators and their right-wing opponents on August 21. Prapass finally left the country and returned to his exile in Taipei on August 22.

Thanom sought permission from the Seni administration to return to visit his ailing 91-year-old father in Bangkok. But the government didn't give him a clear response. Thus he came back, ordained as a novice from a Thai Buddhist monastery in Singapore, on September 19, 1976, and headed for Wat Borvoranives where he immediately entered full monkhood.

The NSCT protested Thanom's return and also demanded his arrest. But Prime Minister M.R. Seni Pramoj was reluctant to take any action against Thanom. And he wouldn't ask Thanom to leave Thailand either.

The NSCT's protest at Thammasat soon escalated into an explosive confrontation with the right-wing groups, many of which were openly backed by the military.

The Controversial Hanging

The second question is this: Was the hanging scene at Thammasat on October 4, 1976, deliberately staged to offend HRH the Crown Prince?

The right-wing groups charged that communist infiltrators staged the show, in which one student actor played the role of one of the two youths found murdered by hanging while they were pasting up anti-Thanom posters in Nakhon Pathom a few days earlier. The anti-student elements charged that the student actor, Abhinan Buahapakdi, was dressed up to look like the Crown Prince in his military cadet uniform. A photo of Abhinan hanging from a tree was published in *Dao Siam* and subsequently

The Student Federation of Thailand (SFT) is holding a 9-day event, starting today, featuring seminars, speeches, film shows and exhibitions at Thammasat University to commemorate the student-led popular uprising on October 14, 1973, and the massacre of demonstrators at Thammasat by policemen and right-wing vigilantes on October 6, 1976.

Today's activities at Thammasat include an address of Thongbai Thongpao on "Facts in the October 6, 1976 incident". Thongbai was lawyer of those student leaders arrested in connection with the incident. Thongbai is scheduled to speak at 4 pm.

Next there will be a panel discussion on "Oct 6: Awareness and Facts". The panel includes Bangkok Governor Chamlong Srimuang and former student leader turned MP Sudham Saengprathum (Progressive, Nakhon Si Thammarat).

copied by a few other newspapers showing some resemblance to the Prince and this enraged the anti-student protesters.

Abhinan, who was one of those arrested on October 6, insisted that there was no *lese majeste* intention and his only facial make-up was some colour powder to show bruises. Moreover, his army fatigue dress carried no insignia.

It should be noted that none of the students, reporters and plainclothes policemen watching the show openly raised any objection during the hanging scene. Photos published by other newspapers, including that of *The Nation*, didn't show anything unusual at all.

Therefore Abhinan as well as most student leaders believed *Dao Siam*'s photo could have been retouched.

An examination of the negative of this controversial photo could clear this doubt.

Why Storm the Campus?

The third question is this: Who ordered the storming of the Thammasat campus?

PM's Office Minister Chalerm Yoobamrung claimed to know who gave the order. He was a police captain assigned to observe the situation outside Thammasat on the night of October 5 and he stayed there throughout the bloody attack in the following morning.

NSCT leaders and those students staging the controversial show had already agreed to surrender to Premier M.R. Seni. They would be picked up from the campus at 7 am on October 6.

But right-wing vigilantes wanted to take the law into their own hands. They harassed the demonstrators with bottle bombs tossed over the campus wall. They also fired at least one M-79 grenade, which landed on the Thammasat football field. They provoked students who were security guards with gunshots and firebombs. Surprisingly, scores of policemen sent to keep order merely watched and lounged inside the National Museum. Why?

The Royal Plaza Protest

The fourth question is: Who organized the right-wing anti-government protest at the Royal Plaza on October 6? And why?

The demonstrators at Thammasat had already been "punished" and arrested earlier in the morning. Why did the right-wing leaders urged their followers to converge at the Royal Plaza on that day to demand government action against the demonstrators and their leaders in the NSCT?

The right-wing leaders led their followers to march on Government House, under a heavy downpour. This time they demanded, among other things, the dismissal of three alleged "communists" on the Seni Cabinet.

Was the march part of a scheme to undermine the Seni administration's credibility, by showing that it was losing control of the situation?

Bangkok Governor Chamlong Srimuang ought to be able to answer these question because he was at the scene. Reliable right-wing leaders also recalled that Chamlong was in fact one of the active organizers of the Royal Plaza rally.

The Coup

Finally, the most important question is: Were all the chaos and violence part of a scheme of some military elements to end civilian rule?

The military was ill at ease with the civilian rule since the downfall of the Thanom-Prapass regime. Political instability, coupled with the communist victories in Indochina, caused many military officers to long for the "good old days" of military dictatorship when there was "peace" and "security".

In January 1976, Prime Minister M.R. Kukrit Pramoj dissolved the House to avoid a vote of no-confidence. His civilian government managed to force the US to withdraw all American troops and airmen as well as close the super-secret Ramasoon spy station. The military viewed this as an "unfriendly" treatment of Thailand's greatest ally. A group of Army officers, calling themselves the Young Turks, tried to oppose the Kukrit administration's decision to oust the US forces.

Among the founding members of the Young Turks was Maj Chamlong Srimuang, who is now the Bangkok governor.

Supreme Command Adm Sa-ngad Chalawyu

reportedly had an audience with HM the King in Chiang Mai in February 1976 and informed him that a military faction, led by Adm Sa-ngad himself, wanted to seize power and restore law and order.

Subsequently, Adm Sa-ngad also warned Prime Minister M.R. Seni that at least one Army group, led by Gen Chalard Hiranyasri, who was assistant army chief, was scheming to stage a coup.

After the Democrat Party won the general election in early April 1976, M.R. Seni brought in the right-wing Chat Thai Party and recruited ex-Army chief Gen Kris Srivara as defence minister to shore up his civilian government, which was accused by right-wing groups as being left-leaning.

Chamlong, then a major, and his cohorts in the Young Turks opposed Gen Kris' appointment as defence minister. This controversy, however, came to an abrupt end when Gen Kris died under mysterious circumstances on April 23. Gen Thavich Seni Wongse na Ayudhaya was appointed to succeed Gen Kris.

Those scheming to overthrow the civilian government couldn't find any good opportunity then.

In October 1976, Adm Sa-ngad retired as supreme commander. He was appointed defence minister in a Cabinet reshuffle in the Seni administration on October 5. On the following day, Adm Sa-ngad led a coup to topple the Seni government.

If all these events were not inter-related and the massacre at Thammasat was indeed just an aberration, then we can only feel sorry for all those unfortunate victims who lost their lives or were imprisoned. (All the suspects arrested in connection with the Oct 6 incident were released under a general amnesty in September 1978.)

But if the Thammasat massacre was part of the scheme to overthrow the Seni government, then we can only feel sorry for ourselves that some of our countrymen, some of them probably still in power these days, could commit such a callous crime to serve their own interests.



Campaign spending

DAILY NEWS yesterday lambasted politicians who were elected in the previous election for spending over the campaign expense limit of 350,000 baht.

The editorial said that very few politicians strictly abided by the law because in previous elections money dumping and vote buying were widespread.

A new law should be promulgated and strictly observed by political candidates particularly the amount of campaign spending. The editorial pointed out that it would be difficult to implement such a measure but expressed hope that it could put a lid on the vote-buying practice.

Senatorial selection

THAI RATH's editorial was critical about reports on Senate seats for sale saying that it damages the government's credibility.

"We hope this elected government will adhere to the Constitution in considering persons to fill up senatorial posts regardless of their party affiliations," the editorial said.

It is hard to dispute reports that money was used to be elected an MP. "We don't want to hear the same thing in the selection of Senators, otherwise, it will make the public lose faith in the democratic system," it said.

Touching on a similar topic, NAEW NA in its editorial said that time is running out for Prime Minister Chatichai Choonhavan to pick suitable Senators.

It suggested that a selection committee should be established, like the British selection process, to ensure that each senatorial candidate has the right qualifications.

"Senators' main duties are to check and halt draft legislations in the national interest," said the editorial.

The Oct 6 massacre — a conspiracy?

16 OCT 1988

By the Nation's Political Desk

In retrospect, there is evidence to indicate that the massacre at Thammasat on October 6, 1976 was not a tragic "accident" but part of a scheme of anti-democracy elements to overthrow the elected civilian government of M.R. Seni Pramoj.

Leaders of the coup had been waiting for an opportunity since early that year. Supreme Commander Adm Sa-ngad Chalawu informed His Majesty the King in February 1976 that he and his military colleagues saw a need to seize power in order to restore political stability and arrest the growth of left-wing groups in the country.

The march of right-wingers from Royal Plaza to Government House on the same day was also organized apparently to confuse and disable the Seni government so that military leaders in the National Reform Council could easily seize power that evening.

Coup leaders claimed that the alleged *lese majeste* play at Thammasat on October 4, 1976, in which students depicted the hanging of two electricians in Nakhon Pathom, was deliberately aimed at "destroying the monarchy, which is part of a communist plan to take over Thailand." When policemen tried to arrest the demonstrators in Thammasat on October 6 morning, they faced heavy armed resistance [of the

demonstrators] using war weapons with cooperation from Vietnamese communist insurgents. Consequently, a large number of policemen were killed and wounded.

It turned out, however, that none of the heavily armed policemen were killed, only a few of them were wounded, possibly by gunfire from their colleagues who stormed into the campus from different directions.

Moreover, only three pistols were found in a thorough and frantic search for arms cache. Right-wing leaders had repeatedly but falsely claimed on national radio networks that communist infiltrators had smuggled arms and supplies into the campus through a secret tunnel linking the campus to the Chao Phya River. There are only drainage gutters, but no secret tunnel.

The ultra-right-wing Thanin regime installed by the National Reform Council after the coup did not make any attempt to find out what had really happened at Thammasat or who were responsible for sending the heavily armed policemen to kill the demonstrators. It is still a mystery who gave the order to storm the campus. Several police officers who took part in the attack remain in active duty today.

What about the controversial hanging scene? Were photos in the *Bangkok Post* and *Dao Siam* real or doctored? The *Bangkok Post* has recently published an editorial

reiterating that its photo was real. But Thammasat students involved in the play have insisted that none of them wore any make-up to make them look like HRH the Crown Prince.

The 19 key defendants in the Oct 6 trial were all released under a general amnesty in September 1978 before their trial reached the stage of examining hard evidence to prove the authenticity of the photos.

Nevertheless, Sudham Saengprathum, then secretary-general of the NSCT and now a Progressive MP from Nakhon Si Thammarat, believes that even without the *lese majeste* controversy, the right-wing groups and those scheming against the Seni government would still be able to find other convenient excuses to attack the NSCT and stir up unrest.

The NSCT knew it was being targeted as a scapegoat and thus it tried to lie low and avoid holding mass rallies whenever possible. Sudham said in a panel discussion on the Oct 6 incident at Thammasat earlier this month.

Activities of the NSCT, such as promoting democracy at grassroots level in the provinces and opposing the US military presence in Thailand threatened the vested interests of anti-democracy elements, he added.

If this was the case, then the return of Field Marshal Thanom Kittikachorn from self-imposed exile abroad on Sept 19, 1976, could also be another move of the



anti-democracy elements to provoke the NSCT. Surprisingly, government intelligence agencies did not alert the Seni government to Thanom's plan to return. And once inside the country, the government has no legal ground to expel him.

Neither would the government arrest Thanom, who returned as a novice and immediately entered monkhood at Wat Boromnivase. The inaction put the government in

direct confrontation with the NSCT, which was backed by many labour unions. This was unmistakably a formula for widespread unrest.

Another surprise was the way military radio stations, notably that of the Armoured Division, could spread misinformation and outright lies day in and day out with impunity and in defiance of the government.

The main picture of a right-wing

conspiracy against the NSCT and the Seni government was clear. But it has not yet been recorded in our national history. The Chatichai government is afraid to look back at this bloody conspiracy and thus it has declined a request in the House of Representatives to start an official inquiry into it.

History will always absolve the innocent. But in this case history must not be written truthfully.

A chronology of events leading up to Oct 6, 1976

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October 14, 1973 — A protracted demonstration, organized by the National Student Centre of Thailand (NSCT), to demand an early promulgation of the constitution turned into a popular uprising against the Thanom military dictatorship. The uprising ended with the resignations of Premier Field Marshal Thanom Kittikachorn; his deputy, Field Marshal Prapas Charusathira, and Thanom's son, Col Narong. The three also left Thailand for self-imposed exile abroad. The uprising ushered in a new era of civilian rule, which lasted until the coup on October 6, 1976.

December 27, 1974 — Thanom slipped into Bangkok to visit his ailing 89-year-old father, Khoo Sopot. But the Sanya government ordered him to leave the country; Thanom left with his father for Singapore on December 29. Khoo Sopot's grandchildren brought him back to Bangkok in mid-March 1975. Thanom's next visit in September 1976 triggered a vehement student protest, which culminated in the massacre of demonstrators at Thammasat on October 6, 1976.

January 26, 1975 — The Democrat Party won the general elections and headed a coalition government. Party leader M.R. Seni Pramoj became prime minister and sworn in his Cabinet on February 15.

March 6, 1975 — The Seni government resigned after its defeat in a vote of no-confidence. Seni's younger brother, M.R. Kukrit was nominated prime minister eight days later.

January 12, 1976 — M.R. Kukrit dissolved the House to avoid a vote of no-confidence and

called new general elections.

February 1976 — Supreme Commander Adm Sa-ngad Chalawu reportedly informed His Majesty the King during an audience in Chiang Mai that his military faction wanted to seize power to end the political chaos in the country.

April 4, 1976 — The Democrat Party once again won the general elections. But M.R. Kukrit — the incumbent premier and leader of the Social Action Party — mysteriously lost in Bangkok's Dusit Constituency, in which the Army has a strong presence.

April 21, 1976 — M.R. Seni formed a new coalition government, with former Army chief Gen Kris Srivara, whose alleged intervention in the Dusit Constituency caused M.R. Kukrit's defeat, was appointed defence minister.

April 23, 1976 — Gen Kris died abruptly. His death exposed the Seni government to political pressure from several army factions, including the Young Turks.

June 1976 — Sudham Saengprathum was elected secretary-general of the NSCT amid growing hostility of the right-wing forces in the country against the student organization.

June 27, 1976 — Kitti Vuddho Bikkhu reportedly said in an interview with *Charuras* magazine that killing people in defence of the nation, religion and monarchy is a meritorious act, just like killing fish to make food for the monks.

July 27, 1976 — Reports about the formation of a National

Reform Council to seize power from the Seni government surfaced in the local press. Leaders of the Oct 6 coup did call themselves the National Reform Council.

August 17, 1976 — Prapas sneaked into Bangkok with help from his former subordinates. The NSCT led a protest to demand either his ouster or his arrest. Two demonstrators were killed and 60 wounded by bottle bombs tossed by NSCT's opponents on August 21. Prapas finally gave in and left on the following day. The Seni government also turned down Thanom's request to return to visit his father.

September 19, 1976 — Thanom, ordained as a novice, returned openly to Bangkok and headed for Wat Boromnivase where he entered full monkhood. "I intend to conduct my religious activity in peace," said a sign in front of Thanom's lodging in the monastery.

September 20, 1976 — The Seni government was undecided on how to deal with Thanom. Right-wing groups charged that only "communists" were clamouring against Thanom's return.

September 23, 1976 — M.R. Seni announced his resignation as prime minister because of disunity in his coalition government as well as in his own party.

September 24, 1976 — Two employees of the Nakhon Pathom Electricity Authority, Vichai Ketsirongsa and Chumporn Tummai, were murdered while making a round pasting up anti-Thanom posters in the provincial seat. Their bruised

bodies were subsequently hung in front of a housing estate. Five junior policemen of the Muang Nakhon Pathom district police station district were held for questioning but they were all quietly released afterwards.

September 27, 1976 — Labour leaders joined the NSCT in calling for Thanom's expulsion and legal action against culprits in the murders of the two electricians in Nakhon Pathom.

September 29, 1976 — The NSCT received permission to hold a public rally at Sanam Luang to air its grievances. The government promised prompt protection but the police failed to stop harassment from right-wing groups. The NSCT gave the government until October 2 to expel Thanom and arrest culprits in the Nakhon Pathom murders, threatening to escalate its protest nationwide if the government didn't respond.

October 1, 1976 — Demonstrators attending the rally at Sanam Luang were told to gather there again the next day to wait for the government's response.

October 2, 1976 — "Typhoon" wrote in his gossip column in *Thai Rath* dropping strong hints about the impending end of the Seni government in a coup by the National Reform Council.

October 4, 1976 — A group of Thammasat students, belonging to the university's drama club but not to the NSCT, staged a play depicting the hanging of the two Nakhon Pathom electricians at Larn Po, in Thammasat to attract public attention to the government's failure to arrest culprits in the murders. The rally at Sanam

Luang was moved into Thammasat because of increased harassment from the right-wing groups.

October 5, 1976 — Two newspapers, the *Bangkok Post* and *Dao Siam*, published photos from the Larn Po play, showing that one of the student actors being hanged had a striking resemblance to the Crown Prince. The photos enraged the right-wing groups and they demanded immediate government action against the NSCT. M.R. Seni was reappointed prime minister. Those students involved in the play denied there was any *lese majeste* intended. NSCT leaders decided to call off the rally in Thammasat and sought a meeting with M.R. Seni to clarify the situation. M.R. Seni also announced on TV that he had instructed the police to investigate the accusation against the NSCT and the students in the play.

October 6, 1976 — Right-wing radio networks, led by Yarn Korh (the Armoured Division) Radio, continued to accuse the NSCT leaders and their followers of being "trouble makers", "communists" and "rioters" during the wee hours. They demanded government action against these "traitors" so that there wouldn't be a "bloodshed". Meanwhile, they whipped up an anti-communist frenzy among "patriots" and village scouts with wild accusations and blatant distortions.

02:00 a.m. — Right-wing vigilantes tried to barge into the Thammasat campus. They shot and threw fire bombs at students guarding the entrance on the Sanam Luang side. But policemen at the scene didn't try to stop the vigilantes.

03:00 a.m. — More policemen arrived, some with anti-riot gear, and gathered inside the National Museum.

07:00 a.m. — Vigilantes commandeered two buses and rammed them into the gate on the Sanam Luang side. NSCT secretary general Sudham and his colleagues had already left for a meeting with M.R. Seni at his residence in Soi Ekkamai.

08:10 a.m. — A group of heavily armed policemen, followed by several vigilantes, entered the campus through the gate under a pretext of wanting to "negotiate" with NSCT leaders.

After that all hell broke loose. Heavily armed policemen, many were from battle-hardened border patrol units, stormed into the campus shooting indiscriminately at demonstrators inside with assault rifles (some fit with telescopic lens), sub-machine guns and anti-tank recoilless rifles. By official account, only 43 demonstrators were killed and about 3,150 arrested.

11:00 a.m. — The Seni government set up a peace-keeping command centre at Government House. It considered declaring a state of emergency but Cabinet members of the Chat Thai Party opposed the idea on the grounds that it would thwart a plan of the right-wing groups to hold a rally at the Royal Plaza.

01:00 p.m. — Leaders at the Royal Plaza demanded the resignations of three Democrat Cabinet members, whom they charged were "communists". Subsequently, they led their followers in a march on Government House.

06:00 p.m. — Adm Sa-ngad Chalawu declared the seizure of government power in a coup.

'Forgive but remember Thammasat bloodbath'

PEOPLE involved in the Oct 6, 1976 mass killing of students inside Thammasat University should be forgiven, but the incident must be remembered as a painful experience in the country's democratization, a former student leader said yesterday.

Thongchai Vinijjakul, the leader of Thammasat University's Student Union during the 1976 bloodbath and afterwards jailed for two years after being convicted of sedition, said the incident should not be invoked by politicians as a smear tactic during the run-up to the election.

"Instead of pointing accusing fingers at each other, every side should concentrate on how they can contribute to the country," Thongchai said.

He was speaking at a panel discussion on the Oct 6 bloodbath at the Thammasat campus. Also participating were well-known human-rights lawyer Thongbai Thongpao and Thammasat University vice rector, Charnvit Kasetsiri. The discussion was organized by Thammasat University's Student Union.

The students had invited Palang Dharma Party leader Chamlong Srimuang to clarify on his role throughout the political turbulence. However, the request was declined by the party leader, who claimed he would be on a campaign trip in southern provinces.

Commenting on Bangkok Governor Chamlong's denial of involvement in the bloody mob attack on the students, Thongchai stated that Chamlong's statements were neither clear nor convincing.

"Maj Gen Chamlong should stop accusing those who question his political past of attempting to destroy the Palang Dharma Party," Thongchai said.

The party leader should be very careful in his future statements not to launch a blanket attack against the people who question his past role if he wants to put an early end to the controversial issue, he said.

Thongbai disputed Chai-anan Samutvanija's claim that Chamlong and the "Young Turk" army officers had lobbied for the amnesty law that benefited thousands of students who fled to join the communist insurgents in the jungles following the incident.

"The amnesty issued by the Kriangsak Chomanan administration can be attributed to the pressure put on the Thai government by other countries after learning of the facts about the incident from Thai communities abroad," Thongbai said.

Chamlong's involvement in the incident was first raised by Palang Dharma's Bangkok candidate Chongkol Srikanchana who recounted how she and Chamlong joined the rightwing movement to oppose the students in the chaos that led to the bloodbath.

Scores of students were killed when rightwing mobs attacked the students rallying inside Thammasat campus on Oct 6, 1976 and more than 3,000 others were temporarily imprisoned.